

Message Text

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, CO

SUBJECT: CAMPAIGN TO REFORM JUDICIAL SYSTEM

REF: A) BOGOTA A-107; B) BOGOTA A-109

1. CONSERVATIVE PARTY LEADER AND 1974 PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE ALVARO GOVEZ JURTADO HAS BEGUN A CAMPAIGN TO REFORM THE COLOMBIAN JUDICIAL SYSTEM. BEGINNING NOV4, IN A SERIES OF EDITORIALS IN HIS BOGOTA DAILY "EL SIGLO", GOMEZ HAS CHARGED THOSE RESPONSIBLE FOR CARRYING OUT JUSTICE, JUDGES AND GOVERNMENT PROSECUTING ATTORNEYS, AS THE GREATEST PERPETRATORS OF CRIME. IN HIS FIRST EDITORIAL GOMEZ ACCUSED THE JUDICIAL AUTHORITIES OF ATTACKING THE COLOMBIAN CITIZENRY BY RELEASING KNOWN CRIMINALS AND CONVICTED GUERRILLAS MAINLY THROUGH TECHNICALITIES IN THE JUDICIAL PROCESS, THUS INSTITUTIONALIZING IMPUNITY AND ENCOURAGING CRIME. AMONG THE EXAMPLES, HE REFERRED TO THE RECENT RELEASE BY A HIGHER COURT OF THE CONVICTED MURDERERS OF FORMER GENERAL RINCON QUINONES (BOGOTA 11054).

2. SUBSEQUENTLY, GOMEZ DEFENDED HIS THESIS IN ADDITIONAL EDITORIALS AND IN OTHER COMMUNICATIONS MEDIA. THE ATTORNEY GENERAL, ALSO A CONSERVATIVE, AND SEVERAL JUDGES HAVE REFUTED GOMEZ WHILE BOTH OF THE INFULENTIAL LIBERAL DAILIES IN BOGOTA, EL TIEMPO AND EL ESPECTADOR, HAVE SUPPORTED HIM.

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3. GOMEZ HAS SUPPORTED THE CONSTITUTIONAL ASSEMBLY (REF A), PROPOSED BY PRESIDENT LOPEZ, TO REFORM THE JUDICIAL SYSTEM AS A LONG-RUN SOLUTION TO THE PROBLEM, BUT HAS SAID THAT IF SOMETHING IS NOT DONE URGENTLY, "THERE MAY BE NO DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS LEFT IN TWO OR THREE YEARS" TO DEFEND.

4. THE TWO PRINCIPAL TARGETS OF GOMEZ' ARGUMENTS ARE THE PASSIVE NATURE OF THE JUDICIAL PROCESS, WHICH LEAVES MAINLY TO CITIZENS RATHER THAN TO AUTHORITIES THE INITIATIVE FOR DENOUNCING CRIMINAL ACTS, AND THE JUDICIAL HIERARCHY, WHICH, THROUGH COOPTION, HAS REMOVED ITSELF FROM PUBLIC SCRUTINY. THIS HAS CLAIMS HAS LED TO THE CORRUPTION OF JUDGES. HE ALSO HAS TARGETED PUBLIC APATHY AS A SIGNIFICANT CONTRIBUTOR TO CRIME.

5. GOMEZ' IMPASSIONED CONCERN IS NOT A NEW OR ORIGINAL DEVELOPMENT. CHAMBER OF REPRESENTATIVES PRESIDENT AND FORMER MINISTER OF JUSTICE ALBERTO SANTOFIMIO HARSHLY ATTACKED THE SUPREME COURT FOR COOPTION LAST YEAR (75 BOGOTA 4784). PRESIDENT LOPEZ' CONSTITUTIONAL ASSEMBLY PROPOSAL REFLECTS CONCERN ABOUT CRIME IN THE COUNTRY. NEVERTHELESS, GOMEZ' INITIATIVE IS TIMELY, COINCIDING WITH AND EVIDENCE OF GROWING CONCERN AMONG COLOMBIANS AT ALL LEVELS ABOUT THE RAPIDLY INCREASING CRIME RATE (REF B) AND THE APPARENT INABILITY OF THE EXISTING JUDICIAL SYSTEM TO HANDLE IT. GOMEZ HAS OFFERED NO MAGIC ANSWERS, BUT INSISTS THAT GREATER AWARENESS AMONG COLOMBIANS OF THE SEVERITY OF THE PROBLEM SHOULD RESULT IN PUBLIC PRESSURE FOR BETTER PERFORMANCE FROM PUBLIC OFFICIALS. THE ISSUE IS SERIOUS. IT WILL BE INTERESTING TO SEE IF GOMEZ' INITIATIVE CAN HELP TO OVERCOME THE INERTIA AND CORRUPTION IN THE COLOMBIAN JUDICIAL SYSTEM.
SANCHEZ

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